

Original Article

Examining the Impacts of Corporal Punishment in Secondary Schools: Unraveling Psychological Repercussions on Students

Mahin Bangash^{1*}, Tayyaba Nayab¹, Muhammad Zubair², Hazrat Nawaz¹, Irfan Ullah³, Sibghat Ullah¹

¹M.Phil Social Work, Department of Social Work, Kohat University of Science and Technology, Kohat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

²Independent Researcher, Department of Sociology, Kohat University of Science and Technology, Kohat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

³Visiting Lecturer, Government Degree College, Thana District Malakand, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan.

*Corresponding Author: Mahin Bangash; Email: mahin.bangash@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Background: Corporal punishment in educational settings is a controversial issue that has been shown to impact student mental health adversely. Despite global movements against its use, physical disciplinary methods are still prevalent in many parts of the world, including the Kohat District of KPK, Pakistan. Understanding the psychological repercussions of these practices is crucial for fostering healthier learning environments.

Objective: This study aimed to investigate the psychological effects of corporal punishment on male students in government secondary schools in the Kohat District of KPK, Pakistan, focusing on its impact on fear, self-confidence, anxiety, aggression, and suicidal thoughts.

Methods: A quantitative research design was employed using a purposive non-probability sample of 120 male students from grades 9 and 10 who had experienced corporal punishment three to five times within an academic year. Data collection was conducted through structured face-to-face interviews utilizing closed-ended questions. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 25 was used for data analysis, with the Chi-square test applied to examine associations between exposure to corporal punishment and various psychological impacts.

Results: The study revealed significant findings, with 68.3% of participants reporting increased fear, 70% decreased self-confidence, 45% heightened anxiety, 59.2% increased aggression, and 67.5% experiencing suicidal thoughts due to corporal punishment. The statistical significance of these associations was confirmed with p-values less than 0.05.

Conclusion: The data indicate that corporal punishment is associated with several adverse psychological outcomes in students. These findings highlight the need for policy changes and the adoption of alternative disciplinary methods that promote mental health and well-being in educational settings.

Keywords: Corporal Punishment, Psychological Effects, Secondary Schools, Student Mental Health, Educational Policy, Quantitative Research, SPSS, Chi-square Test.

INTRODUCTION

Corporal punishment, defined by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child as any disciplinary measure involving physical force that intends to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, regardless of how mild, is a controversial and widely debated issue within educational systems around the world (1). This form of punishment can include a variety of actions from hitting with a hand or an implement to more severe forms such as kicking or burning and extends to psychological forms of punishment which demean or frighten the child (2-4). Despite its wide acceptance in some educational and cultural contexts, a significant body of research highlights the adverse long-term effects on the psychological and physical wellbeing of children. In countries like Pakistan, despite being a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which prohibits all forms of child maltreatment, corporal punishment remains prevalent and socially endorsed in many educational settings. For instance, more than 70% of teachers in Pakistan view corporal punishment as an effective discipline method, as evidenced by a 2014 study highlighting that physical methods are routinely used under the guise of maintaining discipline and motivating students to complete their assignments (5).

The psychological impacts of such disciplinary practices are profound and multifaceted. Research consistently shows that corporal punishment may lead to a range of behavioral and emotional disorders in children including increased aggression, antisocial behavior, and lower self-esteem. These psychological disturbances are compounded by a deterioration in the academic performance and cognitive development of the affected students (6). The fear and stress induced by physical punishment can lead to increased absenteeism, decreased classroom engagement, and a higher likelihood of school dropout (4). This, in turn, not only affects the individual's educational outcomes but also has broader social implications, as education is a critical determinant of long-term socioeconomic status.

The use of corporal punishment in schools also raises significant ethical and legal concerns, challenging the core values of educational and social work professions which advocate for protective and nurturing environments for all children. Leading organizations such as the National Association of Social Workers have strongly opposed the use of corporal punishment, advocating for disciplinary approaches that promote positive behavioral supports and the overall wellbeing of children (7). These approaches emphasize the importance of understanding child behavior in the context of their environmental and psychological needs and applying interventions that are supportive rather than punitive (8-10).

In light of the evidence and the ongoing advocacy against corporal punishment, there is a clear and urgent need for policy reforms and educational practices that prioritize the mental health and safety of students. Educational policymakers and practitioners must consider the detrimental effects of corporal punishment and work towards implementing alternative disciplinary methods that can foster an educational environment conducive to the healthy psychological and academic development of children. As this body of research grows, it becomes increasingly imperative for stakeholders at all levels to engage in informed dialogue and action to eliminate corporal punishment in educational settings, thereby ensuring that children's rights to safety and dignity are upheld in schools across the globe (5, 11, 12).

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study titled "Examining the Impacts of Corporal Punishment in Secondary Schools: Unraveling Psychological Repercussions on Students" investigated the psychological effects of corporal punishment on male students in government secondary schools in the Kohat District of KPK, Pakistan. In this quantitative research, personality traits—defined as the distinct characteristics, behaviors, and thought processes of the students—served as the dependent variable, while exposure to corporal punishment, which involves the use of physical force or violence as a disciplinary measure, was the independent variable (2, 13, 14).

To explore the relationship between these variables, the study employed a purposive non-probability sampling strategy to select a sample of 120 male students from grades 9 and 10, who had experienced corporal punishment three to five times during an academic year. This sampling method was chosen to ensure a representative sample from the diverse urban and rural settings of three tehsils within the district, even when the precise population size was unknown. The focus on male students aimed to assess gender-specific repercussions of corporal punishment, recognizing that males might experience these disciplinary measures differently (15-17).

Data were collected through face-to-face interviews using a structured interview schedule with closed-ended questions. The interview schedule was divided into sections covering basic demographic information and the psychological effects of corporal punishment (18). This method facilitated the standardization of data collection and ensured that all participants, aged between 13 and 16 years, could understand and respond to the questions effectively. Prior to conducting the interviews, ethical approval was obtained from the respective school authorities, ensuring compliance with ethical standards that protect the welfare and rights of the participants. This was in accordance with the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki, which emphasizes informed consent, confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of participation.

Data analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 25. The Chi-square test was employed to identify significant associations between the psychological impacts and the degree of exposure to corporal punishment. This statistical method was chosen based on its effectiveness in previous research in similar contexts, where it has been used to examine the impacts of various factors on child mental health and related socio-demographic variables. By focusing on the cumulative impact of repeated exposure to corporal punishment, the study aimed to provide insights into the broader implications of such disciplinary practices within the educational system characterized by specific cultural norms and disciplinary practices.

RESULTS

In the conducted study, the analysis of the impact of corporal punishment on psychological effects revealed notable findings concerning students' mental health and behaviors. A significant majority of the students surveyed, 67.5%, agreed that corporal punishment leads to the experience of suicidal thoughts, reflecting a strong concern about the severe emotional distress such

disciplinary measures can induce (see Figure 1). This response highlights a critical area of concern, as only 26.7% disagreed and a minor 5.8% were unsure about the link between corporal punishment and suicidal tendencies.

Furthermore, responses to other related questions underscored additional psychological repercussions. For instance, 68.3% of the respondents agreed that corporal punishment instills fear, while only 20.8% disagreed and 10.8% were uncertain (Table 1). This indicates a prevalent perception that such punishment methods are not just disciplinary tools but also sources of fear among students. The study also found that 70% of the participants believe corporal punishment undermines self-confidence, with 17.5% disagreeing and 12.5% remaining undecided on this aspect (Table 1). These findings suggest that the psychological impact of corporal punishment extends beyond immediate physical pain to more profound effects on self-esteem and self-worth.

Table-1: Bivariate Analysis of Psychological Impacts of Corporal Punishment on Students

Statement	Response	Corporal Punishment		Total	Statistics
		Agree	Disagree		
"Corporal punishment leads to feel fear"	Agree	61(66.3%)	21(75.0%)	82(68.3%)	$\chi^2 = 9.794$ $p = 0.006$
	Disagree	24(26.1%)	1(3.6%)	25(20.8%)	
	Don't Know	7(7.6%)	6(21.4%)	13(10.8%)	
	Total	92(100%)	28(100%)	120(100%)	
"Corporal punishment leads to low self-confidence"	Agree	70(76.1%)	14(50.0%)	84(70.0%)	$\chi^2 = 9.115$ $p = 0.009$
	Disagree	15(16.3%)	6(21.4%)	21(17.5%)	
	Don't Know	7(7.6%)	8(28.6%)	15(12.5%)	
	Total	92(100%)	28(100%)	120(100%)	
"Corporal punishment leads to develop anxiety"	Agree	40(43.5%)	14(50.0%)	54(45.0%)	$\chi^2 = 7.526$ $p = 0.023$
	Disagree	39(42.4%)	5(17.9%)	44(36.7%)	
	Don't Know	13(14.1%)	9(32.1%)	22(18.3%)	
	Total	92(100%)	28(100%)	120(100%)	
"Corporal punishment leads to invoking aggression"	Agree	55(59.8%)	16(57.1%)	71(59.2%)	$\chi^2 = 8.940$ $p = 0.011$
	Disagree	16(17.4%)	11(39.3%)	27(22.5%)	
	Don't Know	21(22.8%)	1(3.6%)	22(18.3%)	
	Total	92(100%)	28(100%)	120(100%)	
"Corporal punishment decreases deviant behaviour"	Agree	39(42.4%)	4(14.3%)	43(35.8%)	$\chi^2 = 8.841$ $p = 0.009$
	Disagree	41(44.6%)	21(75.0%)	62(51.7%)	
	Don't Know	12(13.0%)	3(10.7%)	15(12.5%)	
	Total	92(100%)	28(100%)	120(100%)	
"Corporal punishment leads to creating trust issues"	Agree	62(67.4%)	15(53.6%)	77(64.2%)	$\chi^2 = 3.279$ $p = 0.178$
	Disagree	20(21.7%)	11(39.3%)	31(25.8%)	
	Don't Know	10(10.9%)	2(7.1%)	12(10.0%)	
	Total	92(100%)	28(100%)	120(100%)	
"Corporal punishment leads to experience of suicidal thoughts"	Agree	65(70.7%)	16(57.1%)	81(67.5%)	$\chi^2 = 5.646$ $p = 0.040$
	Disagree	20(21.7%)	12(42.9%)	32(26.7%)	
	Don't Know	7(7.6%)	0(0.0%)	7(5.8%)	
	Total	92(100%)	28(100%)	120(100%)	
"Corporal punishment develops negative feelings about the teacher"	Agree	54(58.7%)	16(57.1%)	70(58.3%)	$\chi^2 = 6.865$ $p = 0.029$
	Disagree	19(20.7%)	11(39.3%)	30(25.0%)	
	Don't Know	19(20.7%)	1(3.6%)	20(16.7%)	
	Total	92(100%)	28(100%)	120(100%)	

Corporal Punishment Leads to Experience of Suicidal Thoughts

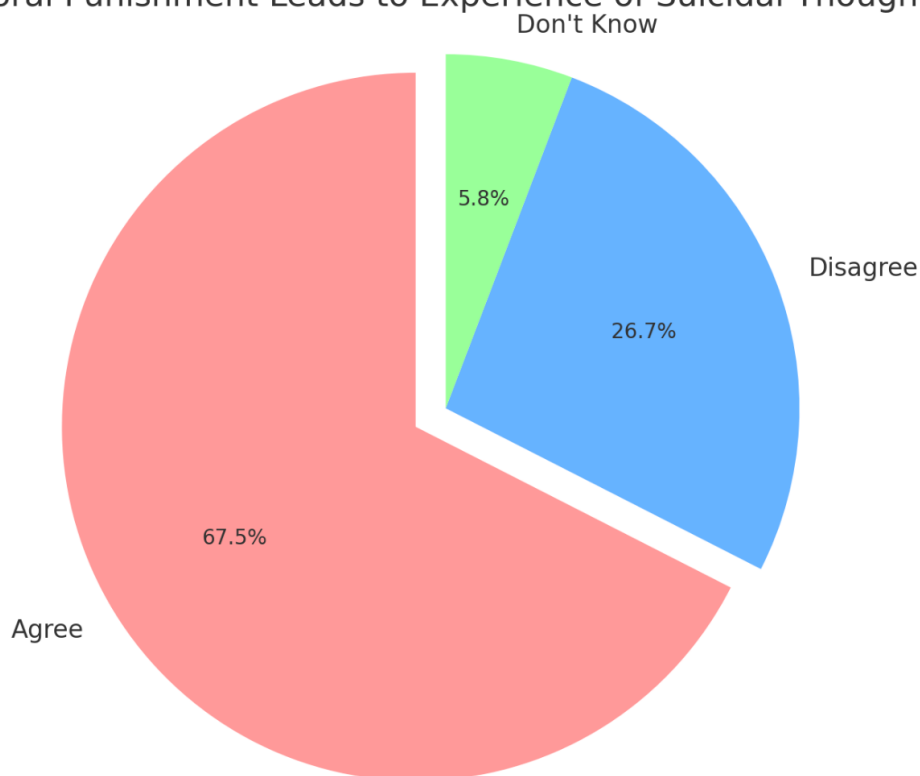


Figure 1 Corporal Punishment Suicidal Thoughts

underscore the adverse psychological impacts of corporal punishment, painting a concerning picture of its implications for student well-being and mental health. The results call for urgent attention from educational policymakers and practitioners to reconsider the disciplinary strategies employed in schools and to ensure that they foster not only compliance but also the psychological and emotional development of students.

DISCUSSION

The findings from the study examining the psychological impacts of corporal punishment on male students in secondary schools in Kohat District, KPK, Pakistan, provide substantial evidence that such punitive measures can have serious detrimental effects on students' mental health. A significant majority of participants reported experiencing fear, low self-confidence, anxiety, and even thoughts of suicide as a result of undergoing corporal punishment. These findings are in line with prior research which has consistently shown that exposure to physical discipline in educational settings is linked to an increase in various psychological problems, including anxiety, depression, and other mood disorders (8).

Moreover, the study highlighted a concerning link between corporal punishment and the development of aggression in students. This aligns with theories of learned aggression, where individuals learn aggressive responses when exposed to aggressive models or when aggression is presented as a justified response to certain stimuli (16). This suggests that the use of corporal punishment could inadvertently teach students that aggression is an appropriate response to conflicts or challenges (19).

Despite these significant findings, the study has some limitations that need to be acknowledged. The sample was limited to male students in a specific geographic area, which may affect the generalizability of the results to other populations. Moreover, the study employed a self-report methodology, which can be susceptible to response biases, including social desirability and recall biases. However, the strengths of the study lie in its focused approach on a culturally specific context where corporal punishment is still prevalent, providing crucial insights into its impacts within this setting (20). The use of quantitative methods and structured interviews allowed for a systematic assessment of the effects of corporal punishment, contributing valuable data to the existing body of literature (3).

In light of these findings, it is recommended that educational policymakers and school administrators in regions where corporal punishment is practiced reconsider the use of such disciplinary methods. Alternative non-physical forms of discipline that promote positive behavioral development should be encouraged. These alternatives, which include the use of positive reinforcement, setting

Moreover, about 59.2% of the respondents felt that corporal punishment could invoke aggression, with 22.5% disagreeing and 18.3% unsure (Table 1). This perception aligns with concerns that such punitive measures might foster not discipline, but hostility and aggression in educational environments. The survey also revealed that 45% of the students agreed that corporal punishment leads to the development of anxiety, suggesting a substantial psychological toll, while 36.7% disagreed and 18.3% did not have a definitive opinion on this matter (Table 1).

These data collectively

clear expectations, and implementing restorative justice practices, can foster an educational environment that supports both the academic and psychological well-being of students (21). Future research should aim to include a more diverse sample to enhance the generalizability of the findings and to explore the long-term effects of corporal punishment on psychological health. Additionally, qualitative studies could provide deeper insights into the personal experiences and perceptions of students regarding corporal punishment, further enriching the understanding of its impacts. This holistic approach will be crucial in advancing the efforts to mitigate the negative consequences of corporal punishment and to promote a more supportive and nurturing educational environment (22).

CONCLUSION

The study conclusively shows that corporal punishment in schools can lead to significant psychological distress among students, manifesting as increased fear, anxiety, low self-confidence, aggression, and even suicidal thoughts. These findings underscore the urgent need for educational systems, particularly in regions where such practices are prevalent, to reconsider and reform disciplinary methods. Embracing alternative, non-violent disciplinary approaches would not only comply with global human rights standards but also support the psychological and emotional well-being of students. This shift is essential for fostering healthier, more constructive educational environments that prioritize the mental health and overall development of students, aligning with broader public health goals of reducing mental health disorders among children and adolescents.

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